For 75 per cent of the world’s population – those living in the rural areas of developing nations – relief from unbearable dental pain is several hours’ or even days’ walk away. Worse still, many will walk for hours or days for help, only to find that there is no-one qualified to treat them. For so many Tanzanians, this has been a daily reality. Driven by overwhelming pain and despair, many people will resort to self-treatment or unqualified help. DIY extractions often aggravate the problem, resulting in sepsis, fractures and other life-threatening situations. Every year, many Tanzanians suffer horrific injuries and complications that could easily have been prevented with the right primary care.

Addressing the problem
Bridge2Aid has been actively addressing this problem since 2004. The Bridge2Aid Dental Volunteer Programme (DVP) is now helping to make this scenario a thing of the past. Over one million of the world’s poorest people are now able to access qualified local health personnel, who have been trained and equipped to deliver emergency oral healthcare under the ongoing supervision of their own regional dentists. This is a proud moment for the charity and for all the volunteers that have helped make this a reality.

On a Bridge2Aid DVP, qualified UK dentists and dental nurses volunteer their time and spend two weeks in Tanzania, delivering specialised one-to-one training to local clinical officers. Since 2004, over 120 dentists and 80 dental nurses have taken part in the programme, devised by Bridge2Aid in collaboration with the Tanzanian government. One hundred and five clinical officers have now been successfully trained. And not only that, in 2010, a further 500,000 Tanzanians will gain access to the same standard of dental treatment, thanks to the continuing growth of the capacity of the programme.

A lasting legacy
Volunteers with Bridge2Aid leave behind a lasting legacy – by passing on their dental skills to Tanzanian healthcare workers, all patients that access the service receive high-quality treatment using safe equipment in an environment with a high level of cross-infection control. Training clinicians in this way ensures that a volunteer’s time in Tanzania has a maximum impact over the long term.

To take part in the next Bridge2Aid Dental Volunteer Programmes in January and February 2010, or to find out more, visit www.bridge2aid.org or call Ruth Bowyer on 07748 645006.